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New Leadership for Hawai‘i and Prospects for Policy Change

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Introduction

Hawai‘i’s slow economic recovery continued throughout 2014. Despite the improving economic news, voters ousted their brash and combative sitting governor Neil Abercrombie in the Democratic primary. The humble, unassuming state Senator David Ige rolled to a general election victory. The new governor, an electrical engineer by training and a veteran chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, looked to bring less in terms of policy change and more in terms of approach to governance.

Governor Ige was inaugurated on December 1, 2014, and his biennial budget was released on December 22. The original request reflected a status-quo budget prepared by the outgoing Abercrombie administration. In late January 2015, Ige’s administration put together an amended budget that slightly increased budgetary requests based on expected revenue increases. Recalling the previous years’ experience of overestimated revenues, the legislature passed a conservative budget largely similar to the governor’s budget request with few alterations or new programs.

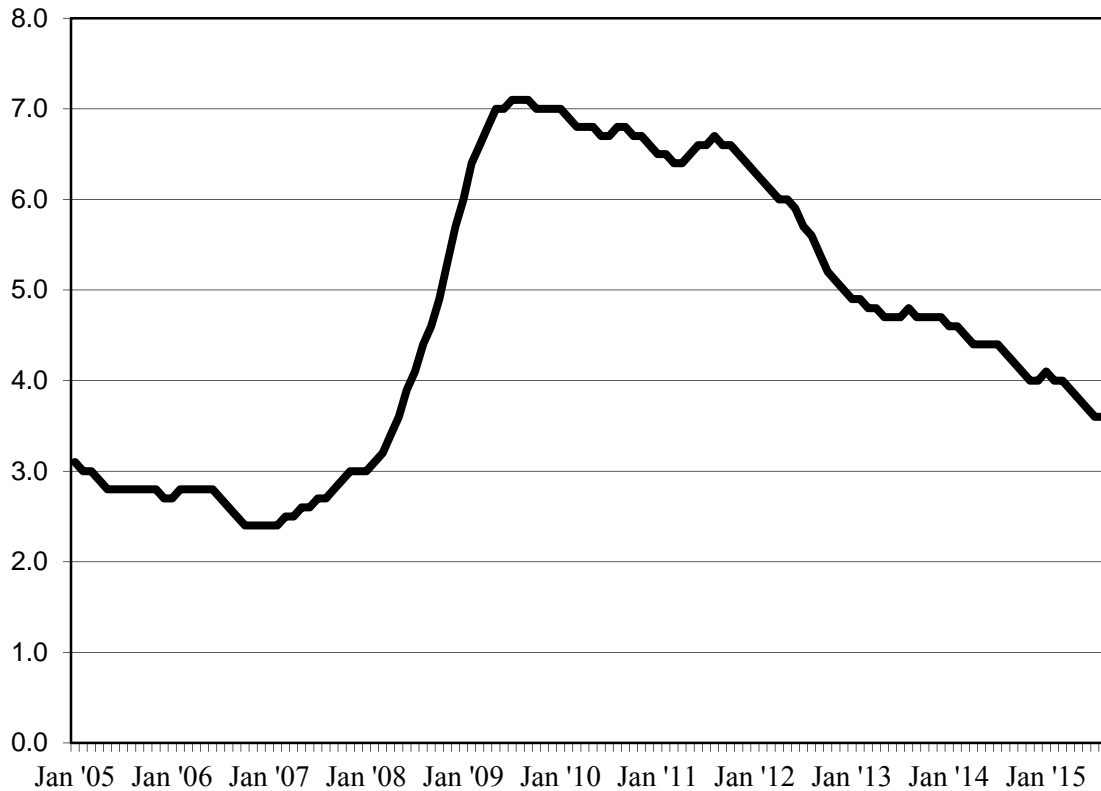
State of the Economy

Through 2015, economic recovery in Hawai‘i remained slow, with GDP growth since 2010 at or a bit below two percent per year (DBEDT 2015a). Unemployment continued its downward trend since its high of 7.1 percent in September of 2009. As of the end of the legislative session in May of 2015, the rate stood at 3.9 percent, still a bit above its historical average during better times (see Figure 1). The bulk of the growth in jobs was in tourism-related industries, such as retail, food and drink services, transportation, and entertainment (DBEDT 2015a).

Tourism, the main driver of the state’s economy, is closely monitored by both the public and private sector. The state was on pace to welcome 8.6 million visitors in 2015, to the tune of \$15.6 billion in spending, slightly better than the previous year. But worrisome for the industry, market data showed a decline in visitor satisfaction (DBEDT 2015b). Further contributing to the decline

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Figure 1. Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment in Hawai‘i by Month, January 2005 to January 2015



Source: BLS 2015.

were higher prices, a strong dollar (making foreign tourism more expensive), and declining ratings of the quality of service in public accommodations (Schaefer 2015).

Hawai‘i continues to be one of the most expensive states in which to live. In 2015, median single-family home price on O‘ahu rose 3.8 percent over the prior year to \$675,000, a new record (Gomes 2015). The housing market cooled in February of 2015, dipping to a \$648,000 median value for homes on O‘ahu (Song 2015).

In early January 2015, the state Council on Revenues revised up its forecast for expected tax revenue. In its estimate, the council anticipated tax revenues to increase by 4.5 percent, one percent more than prior estimates, for the fiscal year (Reyes 2015). Mindful of the erroneous estimates the prior year, the legislature took a cautious approach to spending.

Demographics

Hawai‘i’s population growth has remained slow but steady. From 2013 to 2014, the population grew seven-tenths of one percent to an estimated 1,419,561 (source: census.gov). The Ha-

waiian archipelago is characterized by varying population densities among the islands. The highest population is on O‘ahu with 72.3 percent of state residents. The remaining residents live on the “neighbor islands” of Hawai‘i (known as the “Big Island”), Maui, Moloka‘i, Lana‘i and Kaula‘i. Politically, this divides Hawai‘i into two very different congressional districts: CD1 for downtown Honolulu, and CD2 everywhere else.

With a warm year-round climate, minimal pollution, and a highly active population, Hawai‘i has the highest life expectancy in the nation at 81.3 years (Lum 2007). The state often ranks first in polls of the “happiest states” in the US (see Blair 2013). The median age of Hawai‘i state residents is 38.6, with O‘ahu residents slightly younger than their neighbors on the other islands that tend to be more popular areas for retirement (census.gov).

As one might expect, Hawai‘i differs in many ways demographically from the mainland. Hawai‘i is the only state to never have had a majority white population (Pratt and Smith 2000). Only 26.6 percent of residents self-identify as white only. Asian only comprises the largest ethnic group in Hawai‘i, with over 37.7 percent of the population identifying as such. But Hawai‘i also has a very large population of individuals with mixed ethnicities, with 23.1 percent of the population identifying as more than one ethnicity (census.gov).

Hispanics are the fastest-growing segment of the population, their numbers increased 38 percent from 2000 to 2010 (Kelleher 2011), and now make up 9.8 percent of the state population. The result is a uniquely diverse cultural milieu. Only 75.6 percent of households speak English only, compared to 80.4 percent nationally (census.gov). In addition to Hawaiian, popular second languages include Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Tagalog, and other Pacific island languages.

Hawai‘i has a disproportionate number of military bases, service people, and veterans (Belt 2012), and defense spending makes up 13.5 percent of the state economy (Rucker and Goldfarb 2014). Hawai‘i residents are much more likely than the national average to be serving in the military (1.3% to 0.5%). Many people who have served on bases in Hawai‘i take up residence in the state at the completion of their service. The percentage of residents who are civilian veterans is 12.3, compared to 10.1 percent nationally (census.gov). Accordingly, the U.S. Department of Defense and Department of Veterans’ Affairs are important sources of revenue for the state and get close scrutiny from the state congressional delegation.

Hawai‘i’s residents are slightly better educated than the national average, with 89.5 percent having completed high school, compared to 84.6 nationwide. A higher percentage of residents hold bachelor degrees or higher (29.6 percent in Hawai‘i compared to 28.5 percent nationwide, census.gov). Hawaiians earn higher wages than residents of the mainland. Median household income for the state is \$67,402, significantly above the national figure of \$53,046 (census.gov).

But higher incomes are more than cancelled by the high cost of living. Hawai‘i has the highest cost of living in the nation (Rawes 2014). Thus, while Hawai‘i has fewer families living below the poverty line than the national average (10.8 to 14.9 percent), the figure does not accurately portray the number of Hawai‘i residents struggling to make ends meet. On the whole, population density in Hawai‘i is much greater than the rest of the United States (211.8 persons per square mile in Hawai‘i, compared to 87.4 in the US), which leaves little land available for housing and forces up rents.

With 22.1% of its work force unionized (BLS 2015), Hawai‘i ranks third in the nation in union membership trailing only New York and Alaska. Hawai‘i used to have the highest percentage of government employment in the nation, but slipped to third in recent years. Federal, state, and

local government employ 27.8 percent of Hawai‘i’s, workforce (Lauer 2013). The state trails only Alaska and the District of Columbia in the percentage of its workforce in government.

Political Composition of State Government

Hawai‘i has undergone tremendous political change in recent years. The ouster of incumbent Governor Abercrombie marked a watershed in Hawai‘i’s political history. Never before had a Hawaiian sitting governor lost a primary reelection bid, and only two percent of sitting governors in the nation have lost their party’s nomination since 1984 (Bump 2014). Abercrombie was further embarrassed by winning less than half his challenger’s vote total.

After assuming office in December 2014, Governor Ige submitted the Abercrombie administration’s budget to the legislature. Following release of the preliminary budget, the Ige asserted it would need an additional \$29 million to balance the current year, plus \$117 and \$120 million for the FY 2016 and 2017. Budget Director Wesley Machida warned lawmakers at the opening of the legislative session that the six-year budget plan showed revenues and expenditures to be very tight, with little room for new projects and potential shortfalls if revenue estimates did not hold up (Pang 2015).

During the legislative session, Governor Ige met weekly with the chairs of the House Finance Committee and the Senate Ways and Means Committee. Legislative leaders lauded the fact that Ige was always available to take their calls and even hosted an after-work meeting with bento boxes. At times, Rep. Sylvia Luke said, he even acted “as a moderator” to quell disagreements among legislators (Borreca 2015).

The state congressional delegation has undergone a tremendous shakeup in recent years, losing precious seniority in the process. In 2011, US Senator Daniel Akaka announced he would not seek reelection in 2012 and would serve out his term set to expire in January 2013. Longtime US Senator Daniel Inouye passed away on December 12, 2012, and Governor Abercrombie selected Lt. Governor Brian Schatz to fill the vacancy. The state now fields a congressional delegation that is young in age and seniority and sits on the minority side of the aisle, limiting its effectiveness in obtaining federal grants.

Major Issues

In her opening address, Senate President Donna Mercado Kim stressed the importance of government transparency and proposed an office of the inspector general to investigate allegations of waste, fraud, and corruption. House leaders expressed interest in remedying infrastructure improvement backlogs, and improvements to the Hawai‘i Health Connector, the state’s exchange for the Affordable Care Act (Bussewitz 2015a).

Beach Restoration

The beaches in Hawai‘i are the main attraction for tourists, and their health is vital to the tourism industry. Erosion of sand from the beaches has been a problem in Hawai‘i, particularly in heavily developed areas. The state has lost 13 miles of beaches to date, and 70 percent of the beaches on O‘ahu, Kaua‘I, and Maui are deteriorating (Hurley 2015). House Bill 444, allocating \$3 million for preservation, passed the legislature and was signed by the governor.

E-Cigarettes and Tobacco

Physician and State Senator Josh Green announced he intended to introduce legislation creating parity in regulation between regular cigarettes and e-cigarettes, and more than a dozen bills to regulate the products were introduced early in the legislative session. Opponents argued that the products emit no hazardous chemicals and help smokers of regular cigarettes quit smoking. In the prior year, legislators passed a bill banning the sale of e-cigarettes to individuals under 18 years old. In the 2015 session, House Bill 145 would tax e-cigarettes as well as any other nicotine-containing products at 80 percent. The revenue from the tax would have gone to the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Research Center, but the bill failed in conference committee.

Hurricane Aftermath

On the eve of the primary election on August 9, 2014, Hurricane Iselle struck Hawai‘i Island, knocking out power and telephone service to thousands of residents. The cause of much of the damage was the invasive albizia tree—a soft tree with shallow roots that grows to over 50 feet tall in Hawai‘i’s rich ecosystem. The trees are particularly susceptible to being uprooted by gusts of wind, knocking out power and telephone lines and blocking roads.

Because of the damage wrought, several measures were introduced to begin an eradication program. Senate Bill 591 would have appropriated \$2 million to the Hawai‘i Invasive Species Council for a special fund to manage the problem. The bill died in the Senate Ways and Means Committee due to legislators’ tightness with the state budget. Six other bills for albizia control also failed (Stewart 2015).

Other Issues

The 2015 legislative session considered a number of smaller issues with potential long-term effects and/or impact on the future budget horizon. Of particular concern were yearly increases in overtime pay required by the police department of the city and county of Honolulu associated with President Obama’s yearly visits to the state. The costs have increased dramatically, from \$107,000 in 2008 to \$278,000 in 2014 (see Table 1). The county has requested reimbursement from the federal government and thus far has been turned down (Kakesako 2015).

On March 17, 2015, the Hawai‘i State Supreme Court decided that a number of popular online travel companies must pay the state a portion of the \$247 million in general excise taxes assessed by the state. The companies include Expedia, Hotels.com, Hotwire.com, Priceline.com, Orbitz, and Travelocity among others (Consillo 2015). The court found that the companies had failed to file tax returns and pay their excise taxes on \$2.7 billion earned in 2000–2001.

Budget Process

The Hawai‘i state legislature is composed of “citizen legislators” who meet for just over three months at the beginning of each year. According to the state constitution, the legislature convenes on the third Wednesday in January and meets for 60 working days. If necessary, the legislative session may be extended by the governor or by each chamber’s presiding officers at the request of two-thirds of the members of each chamber (Pratt and Smith 2000). The committee with authority over the budget is the House Finance Committee, and chaired by Representa

Table 1. Honolulu Police Overtime Associated with President Obama's Vacations

Date	Overtime Costs
2008	\$107,000
2009	\$249,000
2010	\$228,247
2011	\$241,005
2012	\$214,728
2013	\$293,731
2014	\$278,000

Source: Kakesako 2015.

tive Sylvia Luke. In the Senate, the relevant committee is Ways and Means, chaired by Jill Tokuda.

The governor is required to offer two budgetary proposals prepared by the Department of Budget and Finance. The first is the budget request, a biennial request in budget years and a supplemental in off years. In addition to the budget request, the governor prepares a six-year financial plan for the state.

The fiscal year begins on July 1 and runs through June 30 of the subsequent year. The governor submits the budget 30 days before the legislative session convenes. The governor's request reflects the needs of 17 departments, his/her office, the office of the lieutenant governor, and the University of Hawai'i System.

The state House of Representatives acts first on the budget, which is then passed to the Senate. "First decking" is the date on which the budget must be passed out of the House Finance Committee so it can be voted on before moving to the Senate (in 2015, it was March 11). The date on which bills are passed from one chamber to the other is called "crossover," which occurred on March 19 for the budget (it occurs a few days earlier for other bills).

Once the budget reaches the Senate, it is referred to the Ways and Means Committee. Second decking, when the budget emerged from Ways and Means occurred April 1. Second crossover, when the budget proceeded out of the Senate and to conference, occurred on April 10. Final decking, when the bill proceeded out of conference and back to both chambers for final floor action occurred on May 1 (see Table 2 for the 2015 budget timeline). The budget is constitutionally required to be balanced every year, mandating off-year adjustments.

Executive Budget

As noted earlier, the budget sent to the legislature in December 2014 was prepared by the Abercrombie administration. Prior to the legislative session, Governor Ige warned that the budget had no room for new projects. On February 12, 2015, the legislature received Governor Ige's proposed changes to the budget (the amended budget), and the governor sent additional proposed changes on February 24.

Table 2. Hawai‘i State Budget Timeline, 2015 Session

Date	Action
Jan. 26	Budget Introduced in House
Feb. 12	Received Proposed Changes from Governor
Feb. 24	Received Additional Proposed Changes from Governor
Mar. 11	Passed by House Finance Committee
Mar. 16	Reported by House Finance Committee
Mar. 18	Passed by House
Mar. 19	Received by Senate
Apr. 1	Passed Senate Ways and Means
Apr. 8	Reported by Senate Ways and Means
Apr. 10	Passed Senate
Apr. 28	Passed by Conference Committee
May 1	Reported by Conference Committee
May 5	Passed House and Senate
May 5	Transmitted to Governor
Jun. 16	Signed by Governor

On the revenue side, Governor Ige painted a rosier picture than his predecessor. Ige’s amended budget expected revenues to the general fund to increase by \$117 million in FY 2016 and \$120 million in FY 2017. He also projected increases in special funds by \$29 and \$21 million and increases in federal funds by \$32 and \$40 million for FY 2016 and FY 2017, respectively.

Ige increased the projected use of trust funds by \$94 million for each fiscal year, increased revolving funds by \$62 and \$60 million for each sequential fiscal year, and cut interdepartmental transfer funds by \$6 million for each year.

Governor Ige also increased expected revenue for capital improvement projects (CIPs), projecting large increases in revenues from general obligation bonds, particularly for the upcoming year. For FY 2016, the governor projected an additional \$116 million in general obligation bonds and another \$26 million in FY 2017. The governor estimated an additional \$20 million from revenue bonds in FY 2016 and anticipated an influx of \$43 million in federal funds for CIPS in FY 2017.

On the expenditure side, a major increase was requested for the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT), to the tune of an additional \$114 million each fiscal year, bringing the totals to roughly \$400 million per year (see Table 3). Other departments favored by the governor’s amended budget were education (\$18 million and \$10 million), Health (\$76 million and \$77 million), Human Services (\$45 million and \$57 million), Land and Natural Resources (\$17 and \$16 million), Transportation (\$6 million and \$5 million), and the University of Hawai‘i (\$7.5 million each year). In terms of percentage of total budget, the departments received less than DBEDT (see Table 3).

Table 3. FY 2016–17 Governor’s Operating Budget Request and Adjustments

	FY 2016 Original Request (\$ millions)	FY 2017 Original Request (\$ millions)	FY 2016 Gov Ige's Adjustments (\$ millions)	FY 2017 Gov Ige's Adjustments (\$ millions)
Accounting and General Serv.	195.3	199.6	5.2	5.9
Agriculture	48.3	48.9	0.3	0.3
Attorney General	78.4	79.6	2.8	1.8
Business, Ec. Dev., & Tourism	286.5	285.6	113.6	113.9
Budget and Finance	2,316.4	2,553.6	0.2	0.5
Commerce & Consumer Aff.	73.6	74.8	6.2	3.1
Defense	112.4	112.8	3.3	1.5
Education*	1,987.8	2,021.1	18.8	10.9
Governor	3.8	3.8	0.4	0.4
Hawaiian Home Lands	57.5	57.8	0.0	0.0
Health	1,669.7	1,689.3	96.8	98.0
Human Resource Develop.	21.6	21.8	0.0	0.0
Human Services	3,022.8	3,147.4	45.1	57.4
Labor & Industrial Relations	464.9	466.1	0.7	0.9
Land & Natural Resources	135.3	128.5	16.7	16.1
Lt. Governor	1.6	1.6	0.1	0.1
Public Safety	259.2	263.8	6.3	7.4
Taxation	29.5	29.8	0.4	0.1
Transportation	856.2	944.5	5.9	4.8
University of Hawaii	1,109.5	1,110.3	7.5	7.5
Total	12,730.3	13,240.7	330.3	330.6

Note: * includes charter schools and public libraries in previous line

Sources: Budget in Brief, <<http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2015/worksheets/HB500HD1SD1CD1DepartmentTotals.pdf>>.

Legislative Budget

In March, the state Council on Revenues increased its projection for tax revenues for the coming fiscal year by \$55 million (Dayton 2015a). Despite this, the House and Senate committees moved cautiously on expenditures, killing a number of new projects advocated by legislators. The final budget bill (HB 500) that emerged from the legislature contained expenditures of \$12.9 billion for FY 2016 and \$13.3 billion for FY 2017 (see Table 4).

With the exception of the Department of Accounting and General Services (which received a moderate boost over Governor Ige’s request), all other departments received just about or slightly less than the governor’s request. The Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism received a sizeable boost over the initial budget submitted by Neil Abercrombie, but not close to the large boosts requested by Ige in his adjustments. The biggest loser was the Department of Land and Natural Resources, which received less than Abercrombie had budgeted and far less than the adjusted request submitted by Ige.

Table 4. FY 2016–17 Governor's Operating Budget Request and Final Budget Appropriations

	FY 2016 Governor's Request (\$ millions)	FY 2017 Governor's Request (\$ millions)	FY 2016 Final Appropriations (\$ millions)	FY 2017 Final Appropriations (\$ millions)
Accounting and General Serv.	200.5	205.5	216.4	226.6
Agriculture	48.6	49.2	49.6	49.1
Attorney General	81.2	81.4	80.6	81.3
Business, Ec. Dv., & Tourism	400.1	399.5	355.7	354.8
Budget and Finance	2,316.6	2,554.1	2,316.6	2,554.0
Commerce & Consumer Aff.	79.8	77.9	78.2	77.1
Defense	115.7	114.3	116.3	114.1
Education*	2,006.6	2,032.2	2,021.9	2,024.6
Governor	4.2	4.2	4.1	3.6
Hawaiian Home Lands	57.5	57.8	57.5	57.8
Health	1,669.7	1,689.3	1,651.4	1,649.9
Human Resource Develop.	21.6	21.8	21.8	22.0
Human Services	3,067.9	3,024.8	3,032.3	3,128.8
Labor & Industrial Relations	465.6	467.0	468.1	466.9
Land & Natural Resources	152.0	144.6	123.5	115.7
Lt. Governor	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.6
Public Safety	265.5	271.2	265.5	269.7
Taxation	29.8	29.9	29.7	29.9
Transportation	862.1	949.4	866.7	951.2
University of Hawaii	1,117.0	1,117.8	1,117.0	1,117.8
Total	12,963.7	13,293.6	12,874.5	13,296.5

Note: * includes charter schools and public libraries in previous line.

Sources: Budget in Brief, <http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2015/worksheets/HB500HD1SD1CD1DepartmentTotals.pdf>.

Reflections of Politics Elsewhere

Due to the legalization of marijuana in Colorado and Washington, there was great legislative interest in cannabis this year. Nearly 30 marijuana-related bills were introduced, although no bill that would create outright legalization of marijuana passed committee (Riker 2015). The state first legalized marijuana for medical purposes in 2000 and estimates there are 13,000 individuals who make use of the law. But dispensaries are not legal in the state, so users must get marijuana from other sources.

To create production facilities and dispensaries, legislators proposed HB 321 and SB 1302. House Bill 321 permitted one dispensary for every 500 patients. The dispensaries would be highly regulated and pay significant licensing fees. Dispensaries would have to be at least 750 feet away from schools, parks, and public housing. The bill failed in conference committee negotiations, but after a petition by the Senate Democratic Caucus, Senate Health Committee Chairman Josh Green was removed from the conference negotiations and replaced by Public Safety Committee Chairman Will Espero (Dayton 2015b) as part of the factional Senate leadership shakeup addressed above.

Senate President Donna Mercado Kim and House Speaker Joe Souki decided to extend the conference committee deadline and sent the bill back to conference. When finally passed, the bill called for an application fee of \$5,000, a license fee of \$75,000, and a \$50,000 renewal fee. The bill requires that Hawaii residents have a 51 percent controlling interest in each dispensary. The final version of the bill excluded excessive taxes, applying only the state general excise tax. Although a marijuana opponent, Governor Ige decided in July against vetoing the bill (Burnett 2015).

Summary/Conclusion

The biennial budget passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Ige was only slightly less than his request due to the legislature's conservative approach. This is not surprising considering the flawed and overly optimistic revenue forecasts made in 2014. The conservative budget allocated \$12.9 billion for FY 2016 and \$13.3 billion for FY 2017, leaving little room for new projects. The budget hamstrung the governor, who would need to think creatively about how to fund projects the following year.

At the federal level, the state's congressional delegation worked together to ensure \$469.7 million in funds for construction and infrastructure. The money provides upgrades and improvements to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam and Marine Corps Base Hawaii. It also includes improvements to the historically leaky Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility, which had most recently leaked 27,000 gallons of fuel in January of 2014 (Bussewitz 2015b). These projects helped fill in some of the federal largesse lost by the passing of Senator Daniel Inouye.

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